

Why Does God Permit Suffering and Evil?

Pastor Joseph Clark – August 27, 2020

“Is man merely a mistake of God's? Or God merely a mistake of man?”

— Friedrich Nietzsche, Atheist

“All thinking men are atheists.”

— Ernest Hemingway, Atheist

“There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point... The truly adult view, by contrast, is that our life is as meaningful, as full and as wonderful as we choose to make it.”

— Richard Dawkins, Atheist

Without a doubt, one of the most asked question of Pastors, is “If there is an all powerful, merciful, and loving God, why does he create / allow, so much suffering?” Here is another way it is asked. “If God is good, then why does he cause or permit so much suffering and evil?”

Sadly, it is also one of the most common reasons people turn their back on God. It is one of the most common questions that believers and unbelievers alike ask. Atheists use it to attack the faith of believers. And I do mean attack. At least a dozen times per week as a minister, my faith is attacked by angry non-believers who feel threatened by my faith. It is one of the most often used arguments to attempt to disprove God. Here are some other versions of the question,” If God is all powerful, why can’t he stop our suffering?” or “If God is real, why is there so much evil in the World?” (Typically, any question starting with “If God is really...” can be an indication of the askers insincere intent as it usually turns out if they begin the question this way, that they are looking attack the faith. Not to effectively reason or seek genuine answers. But I digress.)

I have seen a multitude of answers for this question from various pastors. The question can only be answered with faith. For those without faith, the question can never be answered. However, I tend to be a bit of a hardliner. I do not dilute the

word even if it offends those who believe that it is better to be politically correct than to stick to your conviction.

We do not know to what extent God causes suffering versus permits suffering. But we must accept it.

I must warn you that I have an answer to this question, but it may not be a pleasing answer. My answer is in 7 succinct points. The first short answer which is the basis of the other 6 points is 'Because God deems it necessary'. If he did not, there would be no suffering.

This is supported by:

2 Corinthians 4:17 "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

I wish to acknowledge that this world contains much horrific suffering that involves innocent people. God knows our suffering. Christ suffered unbelievably and died for us.

Luke 13:1-4 says "Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.² Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?"

In other words, God allows people to suffer so they will turn to Him in repentance and not perish for eternity.

Suffering is not to be taken lightly. We all go through it. Bad things happen to good people and bad people seem to prosper or get away with injustices all too often. But we must have faith in God who promises justice. How often do we see a newspaper headline about someone else's suffering as though it is not real, and yet when it happens to us, we cry "Why me?" as opposed to introspectively thinking "why not me?"

In the book of Job, God uses suffering as a test. The Book of Job demonstrates that suffering brings faithful believers into deeper understanding and relationship with

God. Amid his suffering, Job exclaims “My redeemer lives!” This is a lesson for each of us. This is what is expected to demonstrate our faith in God.

God does test us. We do not know if our personal suffering is a test, but we do know that we are expected to have the faith and dedication to God that Job had when we face our tormentors and suffering.

My additional answer is that without suffering, mankind would have no bearing on eternal salvation and eternal damnation.

At this point we are only at page 2 of this article and no doubt the Christian readers are nodding their heads in affirmation and the non-believers...want to punch me.

All life is full of suffering. Ironically, we are responsible for much of our own suffering. This world is full of injustice, torment, and corruption. It gets worse. This world is the playground of the enemy. God permits Satan to carry on his schemes in this World. (1John 5:19, 2Corinthians 4:4, John 12:31, Isaiah 12:14-15). Why? Because it serves a purpose. Once again, without suffering we would have no bearing on eternity. Our purpose is to Glorify God. We do that by receiving Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior in accordance with the Word of God, and we endeavour to live in accordance with the Word of God, despite the world. We are in this world, but in Christ we are not of this world. We discontinue being of this world when we become part of God’s kingdom on Earth. When our bodies die, we join his heavenly kingdom as spirit. Our challenge is to live lives pleasing to God in the manner that the Bible teaches and commands, while resisting the temptations that the suffering of this world invokes.

God is interested in the betterment of our eternal souls. The big picture! The long game! Think of it this way. Look at the thickness of The Holy Bible. It is a big book. Pretend for a moment that the thickness of the Bible is eternity. Our life here on earth is the equivalent of the thickness of a single page as compared to the thickness of all the other pages. God offers a single page of suffering in exchange for eternity in paradise with him. Unless you reject that offering. In which, well you know...but that is covered off in another article.

For God to do away with suffering, God would have to take away human freewill.

At this point many will say, ‘That is not good enough! I want the all expenses paid vacation in Heaven without having to suffer for it!’

And...I cannot help you with that. Sadly, those who spend their lives constantly pursuing a free lunch, blaming others for their problems, and living with entitlement, tend to die that way. Satan was the first narcissist. It is an evil trait that causes a great deal of destruction, which we see all too often. There have been countless published studies which indicate that those with narcissistic tendencies represent the largest group of atheists. There is a French proverb which goes, ‘You can be happy or you can be right all of the time, but not both.’ Let us further remember The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, ‘blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.’

Before we go on, I want to preface that I get it! Suffering stinks! I have had a ton of suffering of my own. I have lived it. I lived with life threatening depression, betrayal, divorce, sin and self-loathing, gotten into trouble in my youth with the law, false accusations, and slanderous remarks made against me to friends and family, threats, persecution for my faith, a child who was close to death in the hospital, relatives who had cancer, friends who died in tragic accidents. And chances are that many who are reading this article have suffered worse than I. I have not had to battle cancer, go to prison, bury a child of my own, or lose immediate family. I write this humbly, acknowledging that we have not walked in each other’s shoes, and I do not profess to be an expert on suffering, evil, pain, or recovery from grief. What I offer is supported by the Word of God. My own experience with suffering will be greater than some and less than others.

For those who say, “I don’t expect special treatment, I just want to live a good life, not hurt anyone, but also, not to be hurt.” My answer is, stay strong in your faith and walk it out.

God gifted us freewill. The freewill to receive Christ and the freewill to reject him. Love is only meaningful if it is given of one’s own freewill. God could have created a race of robotic men and women who were programmed to do no wrong and to constantly do what was pleasing and to constantly tell him that they love him, but it would have been meaningless. I can program my phone to tell me it loves me once an hour. But that does not compare to hearing my child say “Dad, I love you.” God

in his brilliance, selflessness, and infinite love, gave us freewill to love him with meaning.

Here is what The Holy Spirit tells us in the word about suffering:

1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

-1Peter 4:1

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

– 1Peter 5:10

12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

- 2Timothy 3:12

12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

– James 1:12

33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

- John 16:33

27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

- Luke 14:27

Suffering creates questions in our minds that only the Word of God can answer. Suffering draws us closer to God’s counsel. For as many questions as it creates it provides even more messages to us from God. We are instructed by Christ to have the faith of a child. Here is an excerpt of what Ravi Zacharias taught on the topic of suffering:

“...the Christian message stands tall above any other teaching on pain and suffering.”

“Without suffering there is no good. Without good there is no moral law. Without moral law there is no moral law giver, without good there is no evil.”

- Ravi Zacharias

When asked about suffering, here is what Billy Graham wrote:

“The world’s in pain. Without God’s guidance, our response to suffering is a futile attempt to find solutions to conditions that cannot be solved. When suffering comes to us, we must entrust each day to God with praise on our lips. Doing this demonstrates we belong to Him. To tap the power of God in our lives, we must be connected to Him through salvation in His Son Jesus Christ who also suffered greatly in order to redeem us from sin.”

- Billy Graham

Max Lucado wrote:

Whether its two toddlers fighting in a playroom or two super-powers directing nuclear missiles at each other; the cause of conflict is the same. Selfishness. One side cannot get what they want so they demand their way. They fight. War is the fruit of sin.

To ask God to prohibit war, then, is to ask him to prohibit the consequence of human behavior. Something he has never done and won’t do. As long as there is sin there will be war.

- Max Lucado

It can be very difficult to trust God and turn to him when we are experiencing human pain. We might even get angry at times with the state of the world. However, we are best to turn to God for answers during these times as opposed to behave as though we are in a relationship with God in which we have one foot pointed towards the door each time we are scared or discouraged, or displeased. This world is a small part of our walk with God. I believe that in the vastness of eternity, the suffering of

this life is short and fleeting much in the way that the pains of childbirth are easily forgotten. We must remain steadfast in our belief in God's love for us. In Christ's sacrifice and miraculous signs and his own resurrection.

Why does God permit sufferings and evil?

- 1) God has deemed suffering necessary.
- 2) You cannot have one without the other. We must have evil to have good.
- 3) To do away with suffering and evil is to do away with Man's freewill.
- 4) It is part of our sanctification to choose to receive Christ and Glorify God in accordance with the Gospels, in the face of suffering.
- 5) Without a life of suffering, we would be ignorant to the value of Heaven. Mankind would have no bearing on eternal salvation or eternal damnation.
- 6) To drive us to repentance and hope of salvation through Christ.
- 7) To remove suffering and evil would involve removing the freewill of men and women to choose to do good and Glorify God, and truly love God with meaning,

Let us remain steadfast and be there for others during their suffering. Practice mercy as Christ demonstrated and do our best to avoid creating suffering for ourselves and others. Endeavor towards the ultimate test of acting in the Grace of Christ amid discouragement, misfortune, disease, tragedy, injustice, assault. Let us remember how Christ suffered not only torture and execution but also false accusations, humiliation, and persecution, when face to face with suffering and evil let us remember and be reassured of these powerful and glorious words:

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

- Philippians 4:13

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[a] have been called according to his purpose.

- Romans 8:28

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